

## **Ashton says EU backs Dayton Accords, ready to punish those who violate it – Tanjug**

In an interview with a Sarajevo daily, EU Foreign Affairs chief Catherine Ashton said that the EU and its newly-appointed special representative to BiH retain the authority to impose sanctions and other punishments against those who violate the Dayton Agreement.

Ashton also spoke about the need for a strong, majority-backed government at the state level in Bosnia.

Read the full article [here](#).

<http://www.emg.rs/en/news/region/158818.html>

## **How Can the Peaceful Expression of Citizens' Views on the Actions of Their Governing Authorities be a Violation of the Dayton Peace Accords? - BiH Dayton Project**

The cry of "crisis" seems to spring so readily to the lips of the current High Representative (HR) that it can as readily be discounted. Even so, the recent dispute over Republika Srpska's plan to hold a public referendum—which the HR portrayed as the gravest crisis to face Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) since the conclusion of the Dayton Peace Accords—laid bare a troubling divide between the HR and the right of BiH citizens to free political speech. While the foreign, unelected High Representative has often tried to present himself as a defender of democracy in Bosnia, his vehement opposition to the referendum demonstrated a total unwillingness to allow citizens to express their views, particularly their views on the legitimacy of the HR's own actions.

The HR misrepresented the planned referendum as an assault on the Dayton Accords and a threat to BiH. The referendum was nothing of the sort; rather, it would have posed a narrowly worded question to solicit the opinion of the public about laws imposed by decrees of the High Representative. Referenda are fully consistent with the Dayton Accords, which contain no provisions that could be interpreted as prohibiting or restricting them. Referenda are an integral part of the practice of democratic states across Europe and the world. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers was right when it declared in 2008 that "democracy is one of the foundations of the Council of Europe and . . . it is expressed not only through elections but also through referendums . . ." A government's effort to seek the opinions of its citizens enhances democracy; it does not threaten it.

The High Representative has consistently worked to suppress any discussion—much less criticism—of his own actions as a governing official, though he misses no opportunity to criticize democratically elected government officials in BiH, from presidents to judges to municipal council members. The Dayton Accords mandate a democratic form of governance in Annex 4 (the BiH Constitution) and in Annex 6, which requires that the Government of BiH and the Entities ensure to BiH citizens the highest level of protection of their human, civil and political rights. Questioning the actions of the HR, including by seeking the views of citizens regarding the HR's actions and institutions that affect their lives, is not a violation of the Dayton Accords, but a crucial exercise of the democratic and human rights protected by the Dayton Accords and required of candidates for EU membership.

The right to free expression is guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The right of citizens to "take part in the conduct of public affairs" is recognized by Article 25 of the ICCPR.

Those in the international community interested in BiH must consider whether it is not the HR's actions violating the rights of the citizens of BiH that are the real threat to the Dayton Accords and to the continued, peaceful progress of BiH to EU membership.